mission. And we will prevail because of you and people like you.

The last thing I want to say is something you know very well here at Barksdale. You are the proud heirs of a great tradition, a tradition of serving the United States and a tradition, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, of doing it in cooperation with freedom-loving allies from other nations. You are doing it again. Make no mistake about it. You are doing two things: You are trying to save the lives of innocent people, and you are trying to do it in a way that creates a 21st century world that you can be proud to have your children live in.

Thank you, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:55 a.m., in an outdoor area at Hogan Hall. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Ronald C. Marcotte, USAF, Commander, 8th Air Force; Brig. Gen. Andrew W. Smoak, USAF, Commander, 2d Bomb Wing; Maj. Gen. Bennett C. Landreneau, USA, adjutant general, Louisiana National Guard; Gov. Mike Foster of Louisiana; President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); and Rev. J. Philip Wogaman, senior minister, Foundry United Methodist Church. The Executive order of April 13 on designation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia/Montenegro) and Albania as a combat zone is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks at the Seventh Millennium Evening at the White House
April 12, 1999

[*The First Lady made brief opening remarks and introduced Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel, who then gave the evening's featured lecture entitled "The Perils of Indifference: Lessons Learned From a Violent Century."*]

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, we have all been moved by one more profound example of Elie Wiesel's lifetime of bearing witness.

Before we open the floor for questions, and especially because of the current events in Kosovo, I would like to ask you to think about what he has just said in terms of what it means to the United States, in particular, and to the world in which we would like our children to live in the new century.

How do we avoid indifference to human suffering? How do we muster both the wisdom and the strength to know when to act and whether there are circumstances in which we should not? Why are we in Kosovo?

The history of our country for quite a long while had been dominated by a principle of non-intervention in the affairs of other nations. Indeed, for most of our history we have worn that principle as a badge of honor, for our Founders knew intervention as a fundamentally destructive force. George Washington warned us against those "entangling alliances."

The 20th century, with its two World Wars, the cold war, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Panama, Lebanon, Grenada, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, it changed all that. For good or ill, it changed all that. Our steadily increasing involvement in the rest of the world, not for territorial gain but for peace and freedom and security, is a fact of recent history.

In the cold war, it might be argued that on occasion we made a wrong judgment, because we saw the world through communist and noncommunist lenses. But no one doubts that we never sought territorial advantage. No one doubts that when we did get involved, we were doing what at least we thought was right for humanity.

Now, at the end of the 20th century, it seems to me we face a great battle of the forces of integration against the forces of disintegration, of globalism versus tribalism, of oppression against empowerment. And this phenomenal explosion of technology might be the servant of either side or both.

The central irony of our time, it seems to me, is this: Most of us have this vision of a 21st century world with the triumph of peace and prosperity and personal freedom; with the respect for the integrity of ethnic, racial, and religious minorities within a framework of shared values, shared power, shared plenty; making common cause against disease and environmental degradation across national lines,

against terror, organized crime, weapons of mass destruction. This vision, ironically, is threatened by the oldest demon of human society, our vulnerability to hatred of the other. In the face of that, we cannot be indifferent, at home or abroad. That is why we are in Kosovo.

We first have to set an example, as best we can, standing against hate crimes against racial minorities or gays, standing for respect, for diversity. Second, we have to act responsibly, recognizing this unique and, if history is any guide, fleeting position the United States now enjoys of remarkable military, political, and economic influence. We have to do what we can to protect the circle of humanity against those who would divide it by dehumanizing the other. Lord knows we have had enough of that in this century, and Elie talked about it.

I think it is well to point out that Henry Luce coined the term "the American Century" way back in 1941. A lot of terrible things have happened since then, but a lot of good things have happened as well. And we should be grateful that, for most of the time since, our Nation has had both the power and the willingness to stand up against the horrors of the century, not every time, not every place, not even always with success, but we've done enough good to say that America has made a positive difference.

From our successes and from our failures, we know there are hard questions that have to be asked when you move beyond the values and the principles to the murky circumstances of daily life. We can't, perhaps, intervene everywhere, but we must always be alive to the possibility of preventing death and oppression and forging and strengthening institutions and alliances to make a good outcome more likely.

Elie has said that Kosovo is not the Holocaust but that the distinction should not deter us from doing what is right. I agree on both counts. When we see people forced from their homes at gunpoint, loaded onto train cars, their identity papers confiscated, their very presence blotted from the historical record, it is only natural that we would think of the events which Elie has chronicled tonight in his own life.

We must always remain awake to the warning signs of evil. And now, we know that it is possible to act before it is too late.

The efforts of Holocaust survivors to make us remember and help us understand, therefore, have not been in vain. The people who fought those battles and lived those tragedies, however, will not be around forever. More than 1,000 World War II veterans pass away every day. But they can live on in our determination to preserve what they gave us and to stand against the modern incarnations of the evil they defeated.

Some say—and perhaps there will be some discussion about it tonight—that evil is an active presence, always seeking new opportunities to manifest itself. As a boy growing up in my Baptist church, I heard quite a lot of sermons about that. Other theologians, like Niebuhr, Martin Luther King, argued that evil was more the absence of something, a lack of knowledge, a failure of will, a poverty of the imagination, or a condition of indifference.

None of this answers any of the difficult questions that a Kosovo, a Bosnia, a Rwanda present. But Kosovo is at the doorstep or the underbelly of NATO and its wide number of allies. We have military assets and allies willing to do their part. President Milosevic clearly has established a pattern of perfidy, earlier in Bosnia and elsewhere. And so we act.

I would say there are two caveats that we ought to observe. First of all, any military action, any subsequent peacekeeping force cannot cause ancient grudges and freshly opened wounds to heal overnight. But we can make it more likely that people will resolve their differences by force of argument rather than force of arms and, in so doing, learn to live together. That is what Romania and Hungary have done recently, with their differences. It is what many Bosnian Croats, Serbs, and Muslims are struggling to do every day.

Second, we should not fall victim to the easy tendency to demonize the Serbian people. They were our allies in World War II; they have their own legitimate concerns. Any international force going into Kosovo to maintain the peace must be dedicated also to protecting the Serbian minority from those who may wish to take their vengeance.

But we cannot be indifferent to the fact that the Serbian leader has defined destiny as a license to kill. Destiny, instead, is what people make for themselves, with a decent respect for the legitimate interests and rights of others.

In his first lecture here, the first Millennium Lecture, the distinguished historian Bernard Bailyn argued how much we are still shaped by the ideals of our Founding Fathers and by

their realism, their deeply practical understanding of human nature, their understanding of the possibility of evil. They understood difficult moral judgments. They understood that to be indifferent is to be numb. They knew, too, that our people would never be immune to those who seek power by playing on our own hatreds and fears and that we had more to learn about the true meaning of liberty, equality, and the pursuit of happiness.

Here in this house, we have tried to advance those ideals with our initiative against hate crime, the race initiative, AmeriCorps, the stand against the hatred that brought us Oklahoma City and paramilitary groups, the efforts to forge peace from Northern Ireland to the Middle East.

But our challenge now, and the world's, is to harmonize diversity and integration, to build a richly textured fabric of civilization that will make the most of God's various gifts, and that will resist those who would tear that fabric apart by appealing to the dark recesses that often seem to lurk in even the strongest souls.

To succeed, we must heed the wisdom of our Founders about power and ambition. We must have the compassion and determination of Abraham Lincoln to always give birth to new freedom. We must have the vision of President Roosevelt, who proclaimed four freedoms for all human beings and invited the United States to defend them at home and around the world.

Now, we close out this chapter of our history determined not to turn away from the horrors we leave behind but to act on their lessons with principle and purpose. If that is what we are, in fact, doing, Kosovo could be a very good place to begin a new century.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*] Thank you.

We have hundreds of questions, I know. Ellen, do you want to describe what we're going to do?

White House Millennium Council Director Ellen Lovell. Well, I think, Mr. President, you have a question for Mr. Wiesel. And then I'm going to begin the questioning from the room, and Mrs. Clinton will take the questions from the Internet.

The President. I would like to ask you a question about what you think the impact of the modern media and sort of instantaneous news coverage will be. It is obvious to me that we built a consensus in the United States and throughout Europe for action in Bosnia in no small measure because of what people saw was going on there. It is obvious to me that the support in the United States and Europe for our actions in Kosovo have increased because of what people see going on.

And I think I worry about two things, and I just would like to hear your thoughts on it. Number one, is there a chance that people will become inured to this level of human suffering by constant exposure to it? And number two, is there a chance that even though people's interest in humanity can be quickened almost overnight, that we're so used to having a new story every day that we may not have the patience to pay the price of time to deal with this and other challenges? A lot of these things require weeks and months, indeed, years of effort. And that seems to be inconsistent with, kind of, rapid-fire new news we are used to seeing.

Mr. Wiesel. Mr. President, usually, in this room, people ask you questions. [*Laughter*]

The President. That's why I like this. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Wiesel. What you said is correct. The numbness is a danger. I remember during the Vietnam war, the first time we saw on television, live, the war in Vietnam—usually, of course, the networks broadcasted during dinner. So we stopped eating. How can you eat when people kill each other and people die? After 2 weeks, people went on eating. They were numb. And it's a danger.

But nevertheless, I don't see the alternative. Except I hope that in the next millennium, the next century, those who are responsible for the TV programs, for the news programs, will find enough talent, enough fervor, enough imagination to present the news in such a way that the news will appeal to all of us day after day. I do not see an alternative. We must know what is happening.

And today we can know it instantly. If the American people now are behind you, it is because they see it on television and they see it in newspapers. They see the images. They see the pictures of children in the trains, as you said, in the trains. So how can they remain indifferent? And therefore, I am—the risks are there, but I have faith that we shall overcome the risks. But we must know.

[*At this point, Ms. Lovell and the First Lady led the question-and-answer portion of the*

evening. Ms. Lovell called on Chief Joyce Dugan of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, who briefly described atrocities in her people's history and asked Mr. Wiesel how to overcome indifference to suffering, in order to avoid having to resort to military action. Mr. Wiesel responded that those who listened to the beauty in another culture's past would not be indifferent. The First Lady cited Bernard Bailyn's remarks at the first Millennium Evening, that people too often overlook or ignore painful segments of history.]

The President. I'd just like to say one thing specifically, Chief. First of all I'm glad you're here, and I'm glad you're here for this. I think that Hillary and I have spent more time on Native American issues and with Native American leaders than any previous administration, at least that I know anything about. And with all respect, one of the things that I think is killing us in this country—still is a big problem—is a phenomenal amount of ignorance, on the part not just of schoolchildren but of people in very important positions of decisionmaking, about the real, factual history of the Native Americans in the United States.

And you can almost find no one who understands the difference in any one tribe or another. And you can almost find no one who understands that, yes, a few tribes are wealthy because of gaming, because of the sovereignty relationship, but also the poorest Americans are still in Native American communities. And I think this disempowerment, this stripping of autonomy and self-respect and self-reliance and the ability to do things that started over a century ago, still in subtle ways continues today.

And from my perspective, I've been terribly impressed with a lot of the elected leaders of the tribes all across the country. And I think that we really have a huge job to do to not have kind of a benign neglect or not benign, a malign neglect, under the guise of preserving this sovereignty relationship. And we need to recognize what we did and what is still there that's a legacy of the past, so that we can give the children of the Native American tribes all over this country the future they deserve.

I think it's a huge issue, and I still think ignorance is bearing down on us something fierce. And I thank you for being here.

[*The question-and-answer portion of the evening continued. Dr. Odette Nyiramilimo of Rwanda, a Tutsi survivor of the 1994 genocide, asked how governments and individuals could now demonstrate that they were not still indifferent to the fate of Rwanda. Mr. Wiesel responded that nations might be intervening in Kosovo because they had not prevented the massacre in Rwanda.*]

The President. I think we could have prevented a significant amount of it. You know, it takes—the thing about the Rwanda massacre that was so stunning is it was done mostly with very primitive weapons, not modern mass-killing instruments, and yet it happened in a matter of just a few weeks, as you know.

And I want to give time for others to ask their questions, but let me say I have thought about this a great deal, more than you might imagine. And we went to Kigali when we were in Africa, and we talked to a number of the survivors, including a woman who woke up to find her husband and six children all hatcheted to death, hacked to death. And she, by a miracle, lived and was devoting herself to the work of helping people like you put your lives back together.

One of the things that made it, I think, more likely that we would act in Kosovo, and eventually in Bosnia, is that we had a mechanism through which we could act, where people could join together in a hurry, like with NATO. And one of the things that we are trying to do is to work with other African countries now on something called the Africa Crisis Response Initiative, where we send American soldiers to work with African countries to develop the ability to work with other militaries to try to head these kinds of things off and to do it in a hurry.

I can only tell you that I will do my best to make sure that nothing like this happens again in Africa. I do not think the United States can take the position that we only care about these sorts of things if they happen in Europe. I don't feel that way. And I think that we will, next time, be far more likely to have the means to act in Africa than we had last time, in a quicker way.

[*An Internet questioner asked about the definition of human rights, and the First Lady pointed out that the United Nations had adopted a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Mr. Wiesel commented that human rights organizations had proliferated because people had lost confidence in the ability of government to ensure those*

rights. He then suggested that the worst violation of human rights was humiliation, such as by poverty, disease, or injustice.]

The President. Let me just say—there was another part to that question. The young man asked a very good question. The only thing I would say is you should get a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. You should read it. You will find that it also says, in addition to what Mr. Wiesel says, that all people should have certain rights against government. They should have the right to speak their mind. They should have the right to dissent. They should have the right to organize. They should have the right to chart their own course.

And then the last question you ask is a very important one. He said, "Is human rights—are they different from country to country?" And the truth is that to some extent they are, but that's not because people can use their own cultures or religion as an excuse to repress women and young girls, for example, the way the Taliban does in Afghanistan. It's because countries should be free to go beyond the baseline definition if they choose.

For example, we have an Americans with Disabilities Act, which we believe is sort of a further manifestation of the basic human rights. So we don't want—when you say, are they the same in all countries?—no, countries normally, when they have more wealth or a more advanced democracy, find new ways to manifest those rights. And to that extent, they can be different from country to country.

Countries do have different religious and cultural institutions, but the whole purpose of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was so that no country could get away with oppressing the basic humanity of any person on the grounds that they were somehow different from some other country. That's the most important point to be made. That's why there needed to be a Universal Declaration.

[*The question-and-answer portion of the evening continued. Professor Azizah al-Hibri, University of Richmond School of Law, founder of Karamah: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights, pointed out that Islam, Christianity, and Judaism all preach love, kindness, and compassion, but that each had been used as a tool of oppression and suffering. Mr. Wiesel responded that this was due to fanaticism and that part of the solution had to be education.*]

The President. I would like to just offer a couple of observations, if I might.

First of all, I think one of the most hopeful signs I have seen to deal with this whole issue of religious fanaticism in the last few years is the enormous support of Jews in America and throughout the world for the Muslim populations of Bosnia and Kosovo. I think it doesn't answer all the questions of what should be the details of the resolution between the Israelis and the Palestinians. It doesn't solve all the problems, but everybody should see that this is a good thing. I think that the American Jewish community was maybe the most ardent community, earliest, for the United States stepping forward in Kosovo. And I think we have to see that as a good thing.

Secondly, I think this whole question of the treatment of women and children by the Taliban has aroused a vocal opposition among members of the Muslim community around the world who feel that they can say this and not be betraying their faith. I think this is a good thing.

Now, I would just like to make two other points, one of which is to agree with Elie on this one point. I agree on education, but education for what? There are a lot of geniuses that are tyrants. What is it that we're going to educate?

I believe that every good Jew, every good Christian, and every good Muslim, if you believe that love is the central value of the religion, you have to ask yourself, why is that? The reason is, we are not God; we might be wrong. Every one of us—I might be wrong about what I've been advocating here tonight. It's only when you recognize the possibility that you might be wrong or, to use the language of Saint Paul, that we see through the glass darkly, that we know only in part, that you can give the other person some elbow room.

And somehow, one or two central scriptural tenets from Judaism, from Islam, from the Koran, and from Christianity, need to be put in one little place and need to be propagated throughout the world—to preach a little humility, if you please. Otherwise, we'll never get there.

The second point I wanted to make is this: A lot of these people that are saying this in the name of religion, they're kidding. They know perfectly well that religion has nothing to do with it. It's about power and control, and they're manipulating other people. And when it is, if

it's someone who practices our faith, we've got to have the guts to stand up and say that. And it's hard, but we have to.

[*The First Lady agreed, saying that the new century offered an opportunity for Jews, Christians, and Muslims to work together against fanaticism.*]

The President. I would like to make one more point which I think is very important in the dealings between the West and the Islamic countries, generally, and I will use Iran as an example.

It may be that the Iranian people have been taught to hate or distrust the United States or the West on the grounds that we are infidels and outside the faith. And therefore, it is easy for us to be angry and to respond in kind. I think it is important to recognize, however, that Iran, because of its enormous geopolitical importance over time, has been the subject of quite a lot of abuse from various Western nations. And I think sometimes it's quite important to tell people, "Look, you have a right to be angry at something my country or my culture or others that are generally allied with us today did to you 50 or 60 or 100 or 150 years ago. But that is different from saying that I am outside the faith, and you are God's chosen."

So sometimes people will listen to you if you tell them, "You're right, but your underlying reason is wrong." So we have to find some way to get dialog, and going into total denial when you're in a conversation with somebody who's been your adversary, in a country like Iran that is often worried about its independence and its integrity, is not exactly the way to begin.

So I think while we speak out against religious intolerance, we have to listen for possible ways we can give people the legitimacy of some of their fears or some of their angers or some of their historic grievances, and then say they rest on other grounds; now, can we build a common future? I think that's very important. Sometimes I think we in the United States, and Western culture generally, we hate to do that. But we're going to have to if we want to have an ultimate accommodation.

[*The question-and-answer portion of the evening continued. Atiba de Souza, a University of Maryland student who emigrated from Trinidad as a child, suggested that in the next few years the Nation's minorities would become the majority, and asked if and how a global society could be achieved. Mr. Wiesel emphasized the importance of education, in schools and through the media.*]

The President. I would just make two points, I think. First of all, I think given the fact that we're living in an age of globalization, where, whether we like it or not, more and more of our economic and cultural and other contacts will cross national lines, it is, in fact, a very good thing that sometime in the next century there will be no single majority racial group.

But I should also tell you that before we had large numbers of African-Americans coming, who were not here or direct descendants from slaves but others coming, like you did, from the Caribbean, and before we had large numbers of Hispanics, 100 years ago, Irish immigrants to this country were treated as if they were of a different racial group. So we've always had these tensions.

But I think if we can learn to live together across our racial and religious lines, in a way that not just respects but actually celebrates our diversity, that does it within the framework, as I said, of a common fabric of shared values and shared opportunity, I think that will be quite a good thing for the 21st century. I think it will make America stronger, not weaker. So I look forward to that.

The second thing I want to say is I think that to get there we're going to have to more broadly find a way to have more economic and educational balance in the share of wealth, in the share of knowledge, across all of our racial and ethnic groups. There is no easy way to achieve that. But I am convinced that—and I see your colleague, Mr. Silber, out here, who's thought about this a great deal in his life—I'm convinced that lowering standards for people who come from poor backgrounds is not the answer.

I think we should raise standards and invest more resources in helping people achieve them. And then I think we need to provide the incentives in every neighborhood, in every Native American reservation, in every rural area, that have made the economy work elsewhere. It will never be perfectly done, but we can do a much, much better job of it. And unless we do a much better job educationally and economically, then we won't have all the benefits from our racial diversity that we could otherwise enjoy.

[*The question-and-answer portion of the evening continued. Ms. Lovell then thanked the participants and invited the President's closing remarks.*]

The President. I don't think there's much more to say, except to thank you again for once again giving us your witness and for the powerful example of your life. We thank your family for joining us. And I thank all of you for caring about this.

I believe there's grounds for hope. I think the history of this country is evidence. I think the civil rights movement is evidence. I think the life and triumph of Nelson Mandela is evidence. I think evidence abounds.

What we all have to remember is somehow how to strike the proper balance of passion and humility. I think our guest tonight has done it magnificently, and I thank him.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The White House Millennium Evening began at 7:37 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); John Silber, chancellor, Boston University; and President Nelson Mandela of South Africa. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady and Elie Wiesel and the question-and-answer portion of the evening. The discussion was cybercast on the Internet.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters
April 13, 1999

Situation in the Balkans

The President. Good afternoon. I have just had a long and very good meeting with a large number of Members of Congress to discuss America's effort, along with our NATO Allies, to stand against ethnic cleansing, save lives, and bring peace in Kosovo. I'm grateful for the support we have received from Members of Congress from both parties and also very grateful for the questions, the comments, the advice that came out of this and previous meetings.

Our objectives here are clear, but I want to restate them. We want the Serb forces out of Kosovo. We want the refugees to be able to go home, protected by an international security force, as they work toward self-government.

This is Holocaust Remembrance Day. On this day, let us resolve not to let this ethnic cleansing and killing by Mr. Milosevic go unanswered.

You know, yesterday I had the privilege of meeting at Barksdale Air Force Base with aircrews participating in the allied campaign. They and all our forces are performing with extraordinary courage and skill. They are very well prepared, and their morale is high. They know they and our allies are fighting to end human suffering, and for a Europe that is united, democratic, and at peace.

Our campaign is diminishing and grinding down Mr. Milosevic's military capabilities. We have weakened Serbia's air defenses and command and control. We have reduced his ability to move, sustain, and supply the war machine in Kosovo. We have damaged his refineries and diminished his capacity to produce ammunition. We are striking now at his tanks and at his artillery, and have destroyed half his advanced MiG-29 aircraft.

Now we are taking our allied air campaign to the next level, with more aircraft in the region, with a British carrier joining our U.S.S. *Roosevelt* and a French carrier in the area. Our humanitarian effort is also increasing to meet the daunting challenge of providing food and shelter for the hundreds of thousands of refugees.

All of us would like the conflict to end, especially for the suffering people of Kosovo. We would also like to end the trials for the people of Serbia, who have been forced into confrontation by a cynical leader who has no regard for their welfare and who, I am absolutely convinced, has not even told them the truth about what he has done to the people of Kosovo.